

Testimony of Patrick Sullivan  
Co-Director of Advocacy & Awareness  
Yale Undergraduate Prison Project

March 2, 2015  
68 High St, B 21  
New Haven, CT 06511

In favor: H.B. No. 5237  
An Act Concerning Fair Chance Employment

My name is Patrick Sullivan, and, on behalf of the Yale Undergraduate Prison Project, I urge the committee to pass House Bill 5237. This proposal, essential to reforming the policies surrounding Connecticut's criminal justice system, recognizes that we must eliminate the potential for discrimination against formerly incarcerated individuals in order to support equality of opportunity in hiring practices. Furthermore, it breaks down a significant barrier in the reentry process thereby facilitating the growth of a safe, strong and empowering community.

Employment is arguably the most important factor in successful reentry into the community following incarceration. The question of former incarceration, or "the box" as it is commonly known, creates a huge obstacle for all people with a criminal record. Employers use those facts to discriminate against formerly incarcerated individuals at every step of the process. For example, a recent study done by the National Institute of Justice demonstrated that a criminal record "reduced the likelihood of a callback or job offer by nearly 50 percent." By delaying the process of the background check until after a conditional job offer has been made, this bill would drastically curtail employment discrimination against ex-offenders.

In my work with the Yale Undergraduate Prison Project, I mentor and tutor young men my age whose applications, when they leave prison, will be repeatedly thrown out, simply because they have a criminal record. For a few months, I worked with a young man who was sentenced, as a twenty year old, to one year in prison. In our conversations, I would ask him a few questions to get the discussion going or ask him to clarify something or expand on a thought, but most of the time I wasn't sure which way the mentoring was going. For the rest of his life, however, he will have his job applications taken out of the pile because he is required to check a box on a form. As he struggles to get a foothold in this discriminatory job market, I urge you consider the impact that this bill would have on his life and the lives of thousands of people across the state of Connecticut.

Passing this bill does not mean, as some opponents argue, compromising safety in any way. Background checks still exist, but that question would not inform initial job offers. Passing this bill, however, does mean stopping unequal, often racially discriminatory questions on employment forms. Passing this bill means listening to residents of the state of Connecticut, evidenced by the more than 400 letters I have here. Passing this bill means reducing recidivism by eliminating discrimination in hiring practices, investing in employment opportunities that make our communities stronger, and empowering all people in the state of Connecticut.

Thank you for your time.